

PROJECT PROFILE

By Lori E. Miller

San Bernardino County Stormwater Public Education Program Scores an A With Residents and Businesses

San Bernardino County, located approximately 60 mi. from Los Angeles, CA, has a population of more than 1 million people and is home to some of southern California's most prosperous industries and corporations. The county offers residents and visitors a host of popular natural resources and attractions, including Big Bear, Lake Arrowhead, Joshua Tree National Park, Lake Gregory, Death Valley National Park, and San Bernardino National Forest.

Although the county is part of the state's "Inland Empire," residents regularly take advantage of nearby beaches, rivers, and lakes. Protecting local valuable environmental resources is an important issue in southern California, and one of the top concerns in the area is stormwater pollution. San Bernardino County is extremely committed to protecting its own waterways as well as the lakes, oceans, and rivers in neighboring communities. To help protect the environment, the county developed an educational program to directly address stormwater pollution.

To this end, 16 cities, the county, and the flood control district in San

Bernardino County united to sponsor the educational program. The participating cities are Big Bear Lake, Chino, Chino Hills, Colton, Fontana, Grand Terrace, Highland, Loma Linda, Montclair, Ontario, Rancho Cucamonga, Redlands, Rialto, San Bernardino, Upland, and Yucaipa.

"Our primary goal with the campaign is to increase awareness among residents about the stormwater issue and the impact that residents have on water quality," says Naresh Varma, chief of the Environmental Management Division in the county's Department of Public Works.

Nancy DeCoursey, senior environmental control technician for the City of Fontana and chair of the Public Education Subcommittee adds, "We also want to encourage behavioral

changes among individuals as they go about their daily routines—changes that will ultimately reduce the amount of pollutants flowing

through the storm drain system into local waterways."

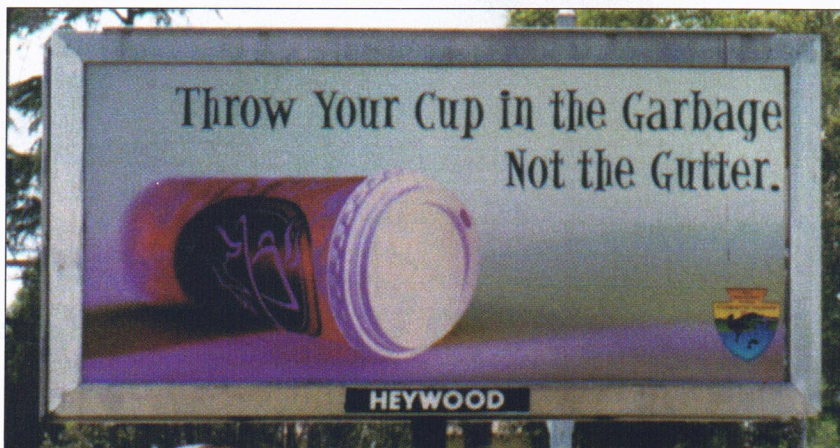
The campaign, called The San Bernardino County Stormwater Public Education Program, began in 1994, and today it is one of the county's most successful community pro-

grams. It has helped change attitudes and perceptions among county residents about the impact of urban runoff, and it has stimulated measured behavioral changes among individuals and businesses. These changes are accumulating to help reduce the pollutants that end up in the storm drain system—and that ultimately pollute local rivers, lakes, and beaches.

The program uses a multifaceted campaign, incorporating community outreach, corporate partnership programs, and targeted advertising into print and broadcast media. The educational program focuses on key stormwater issues and pollutants, including reducing litter, getting residents to pick up their dog waste, and reducing the runoff from the use of pesticides and fertilizers.

County Research Study

The campaign has been well received by local residents. The county recently conducted an in-depth sur-



vey to measure the impact of the program's messages and educational tips. The San Bernardino County Stormwater Program released findings from its strategic stormwater research study of county residents and their knowledge and opinions regarding this environmental issue.

Some key findings from "2002 San Bernardino County Stormwater Program Study" revealed the following:

- Residents are concerned about water and storm drain pollution. In fact, 58% of those surveyed stated that pollution of local beaches is a serious problem, and 44% said pollution of local storm drains is a serious problem.
- One factor that might help explain high levels of concern about the water pollution issues is that so many of San Bernardino County residents visit beaches and local lakes. While 69% indicated they visited a beach in the last year or two, 40% said they regularly engage in ocean activities, such as surfing, swimming, and fishing.
- Residents want to learn more. According to the survey, more than 25% of people are very interested in learning how to reduce pollution.
- Sixty-two percent said they would

definitely change their behavior if they learned they were polluting waterways.

- Those who recall seeing information and advertising about storm drain pollution were more concerned about pollution. Nearly half (48%) of the adult residents in the county say they have seen, read, or heard something in the past year about the storm drain system and the pollution of local waters. This number has doubled since the last survey in 1997, when the number was 23%.

Residents, Businesses Take Action

The county realized that for the program to be successful, it must be comprehensive, encompassing grassroots educational tools, community outreach, and partnerships with local businesses and the corporate community. Stormwater pollution affects everyone, and both individuals and local businesses are taking responsibility and changing their habits to help clean up the local waters.

Major companies in San Bernardino literally have stepped up to the plate. Such companies as Lowe's, Home Depot, Ace Hardware, PETCO, and other home and garden stores are active participants in promoting this program.

Ken Lambert, manager of the San Bernardino branch of Ace Hardware, notes, "It is a valuable program, and as a business in the community, we want to do what we can to improve our environment."

The county has created in-store point-of-purchase displays and easy-to-read, helpful tip cards that are now distributed at more than 120 area stores. The stores and their employees enthusiastically distribute the tip cards to customers and encourage them to read the material and follow the valuable advice. The cards cover a variety of topics that address stormwater pollution prevention, including "Paint Tips to Prevent Pollution," "Pesticide Tips to Prevent Pollution," "Fertilizer Tips to Prevent Pollution," and "Curbing Pollution by Picking Up After Your Pooch." The cards are available in both English and Spanish.

The program annually distributes more than 50,000 tip cards at the



stores and trains almost 1,000 employees so they also can provide customers with important information about pollution prevention.

Advertising Campaign Garneres International Award

Another key component of the San Bernardino County Stormwater Public Education Program is an innovative advertising campaign featuring outdoor billboards, print ads, and radio spots. The ads, similar to the tip cards, focus on key stormwater issues and offer tips on preventing pollution.

San Bernardino County's print advertising campaign, "Street Stories," was so successful that it was recognized with a Certificate of Merit for Outstanding Creativity at the 2002 International Mobius Advertising Awards in the category of Environmental Issues & Concerns.

What's Next?

The county continues to expand the program and promote the need for proactive prevention of stormwater pollution. San Bernardino County also offers fact sheets, tips, and school presentations via its Web site. Residents, businesses, and educators are encouraged to access the county's helpful material on-line at

www.sbcounty.gov/stormwater

San Bernardino County's education program scores an A for its originality and relevance and for directly speaking to those who matter most when it comes to stormwater safety—the residents who live, work, and play in the community.



Guest author **Lori E. Miller** lives in the San Bernardino, CA, area.